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Panel 6: PH.D PROGRAMS IN INFORMATION SYSTEMS: FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES

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For each graduate of a Ph.D. program in information systems (IS) there are between twelve to fifteen teaching positions available. Recently, several programs have been initiated to re-train faculty from other disciplines in order to meet the demand. This situation contrasts sharply with most other academic fields, where there are more applicants than positions, and makes it doubly important that we understand the factors and processes that lead to the production of quality researchers in IS.

The Ph.D. is essentially a research degree. Becoming proficient in research involves mastering four kinds of skills:

1. Understanding the content and boundaries of knowledge in the field in order to formulate interesting questions for investigation and to permit the accumulation of knowledge.

2. Developing methodological skills needed to investigate questions once they are identified.

3. Acquiring experience in actually executing research. One learns by doing.

4. Presenting the results of research in a clear and concise manner.

There are many ways to accomplish these goals. Designers of Ph.D. programs make choices on how resources are allocated among these activities. Often these choices stem from differences in philosophy, as well as in available resources. Somehow, fundamental questions, such as depth vs. breadth and rigor vs. relevance, must be resolved for each program. Yet, the major programs have much in common, suggesting agreement on certain principles.

The panelists at this session bring a wide range of experience with Ph.D. programs and represent a diversity of views. Topics to be discussed include:

- What are the appropriate foundation disciplines for IS and how should they be represented in a program?

- Ways of making the RA experience meaningful

- Considerations in selecting a dissertation topic

- Assessing student performance and providing feedback

- Are there viable alternatives to the deductive/hypothesis testing approach to scientific investigation?